

Understanding The Effects of Trauma on Children

**South Africa – 2014
Ruby M. Johnston**



Child Trauma

Trauma:

- ◉ Witnessing or experiencing an event that poses a real or perceived threat.
- ◉ The event overwhelms the child's ability to cope.

◉ Acute

- ◉ One time event – disaster, car accident, fire, etc

◉ Complex Developmental Trauma

- ◻ *Multiple* interpersonal traumatic events from a very young age
- ◻ *Profound* effects on nearly every aspect of development and functioning

Well-Being

Social and Emotional Well-Being Continuum



No trauma symptoms;
social and emotional
function is optimal

Diagnosed with Post
Traumatic Stress
Disorder; social and
emotional function is
severely impaired

Developmental Stage

Young children

- Express feelings through behaviors
- Regressive behaviors such as bedwetting

School age children

- Triggered by concrete reminders
- Fluctuate between aggression and withdrawal

Adolescents

- May engage in reckless behavior or have avoidant behavior
- Substance abuse is common

The earlier an untreated trauma occurs, the greater its negative impact will be

Adverse Childhood Experiences Study

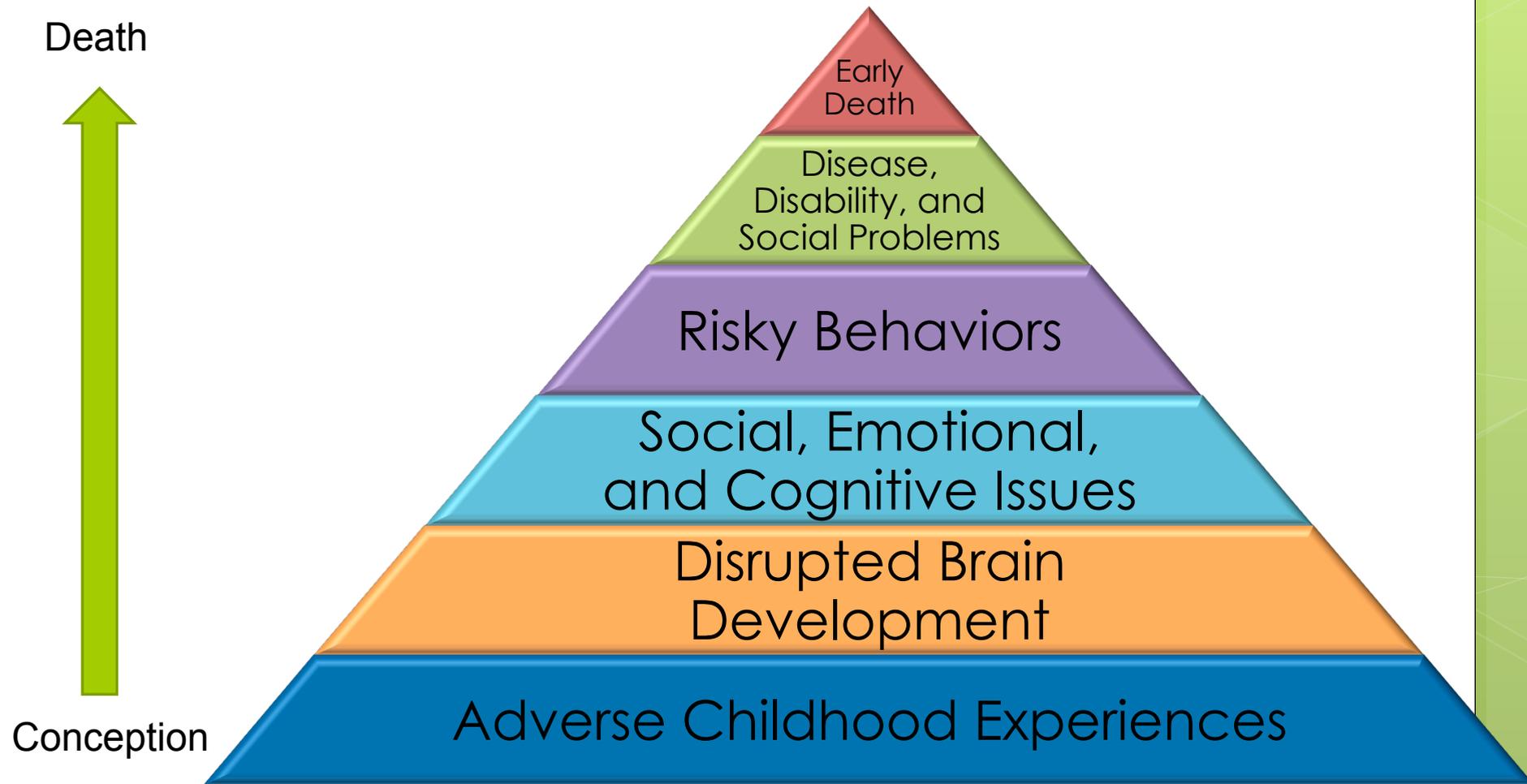
Abuse and Neglect

- Emotional Abuse
- Emotional Neglect
- Physical Abuse
- Physical Neglect
- Sexual Abuse

Family Issues

- Drug Addicted or Alcoholic Family Member
- Incarceration of a Family Member
- Loss of a Parent Due to Death, Divorce or Abandonment
- Mentally Ill, Depressed or Suicidal Family Member
- Witnessing Domestic Violence

Long-Term Impact of Trauma

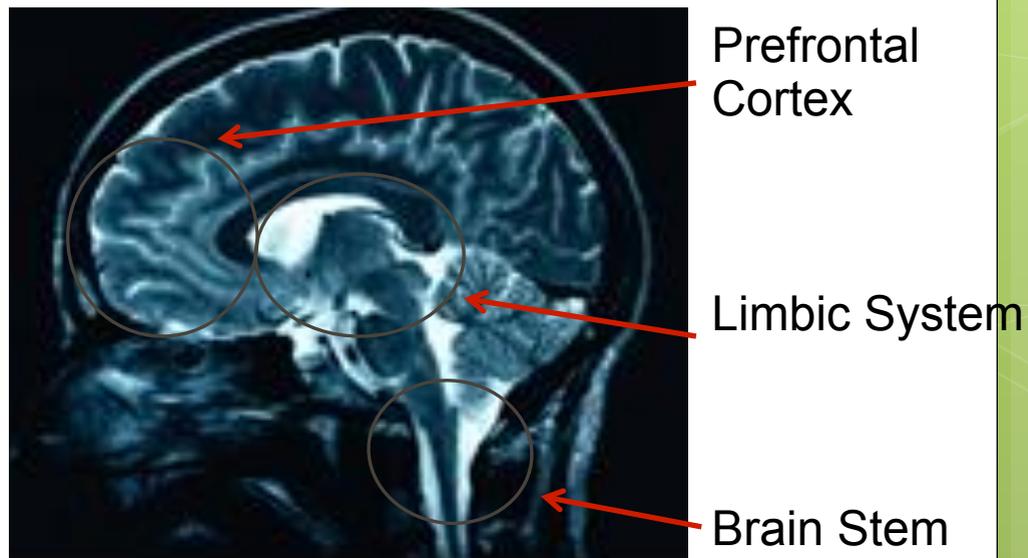
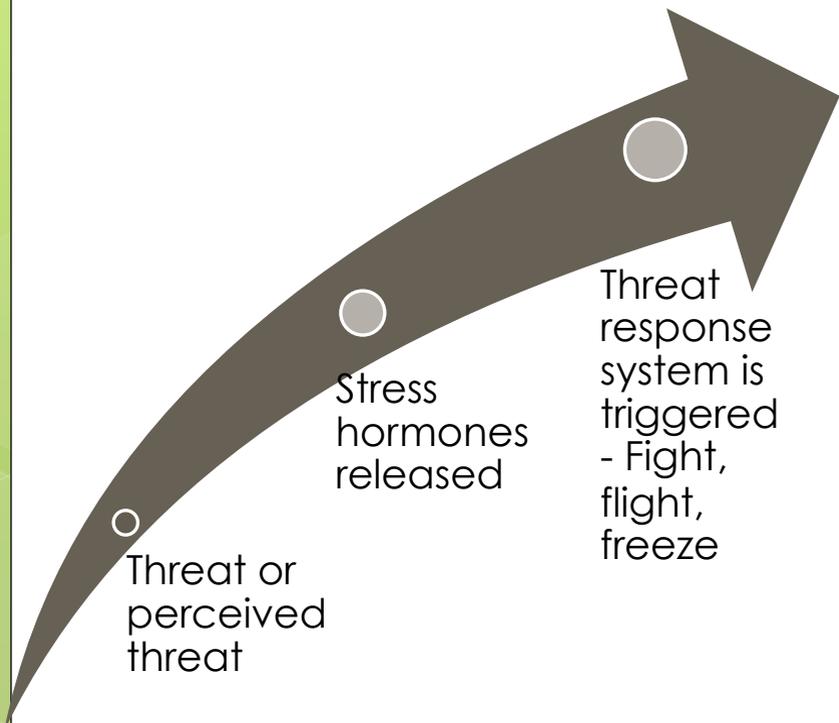


Key Fact

The brain develops in response to experiences with caregivers, family, and the community, and the quality of those experiences affects whether the child will develop a strong or weak foundation for all future learning, behavior, and health.

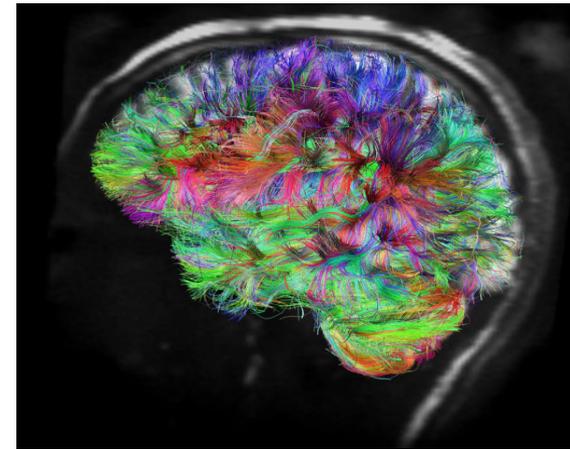
(Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2007).

The Stress Response



BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

The brain is a use-dependent organ



Picture from Discoverymag.com



The neurons that fire together wire together

Paradigm shift

From

“What did you do?”

To

“What happened to you and what do you need?”



Neurobiological Affects on Attachment



7 Skills for Children's Workers

Understand
trauma's
impact

Maximize felt
safety

Help child to
manage
emotions

Personal Self
Care



Help child to
manage
behavior

Help child to
understand life
story

Support
Relationships

Strategies that Work

- Establish and keep routines.
- Avoid punishing anxiety-related behavior problems.
- Help youth prepare for transitions.
- Use empathy and support.
- Don't push for discussions about past trauma.
- Don't judge youths stories of past trauma.

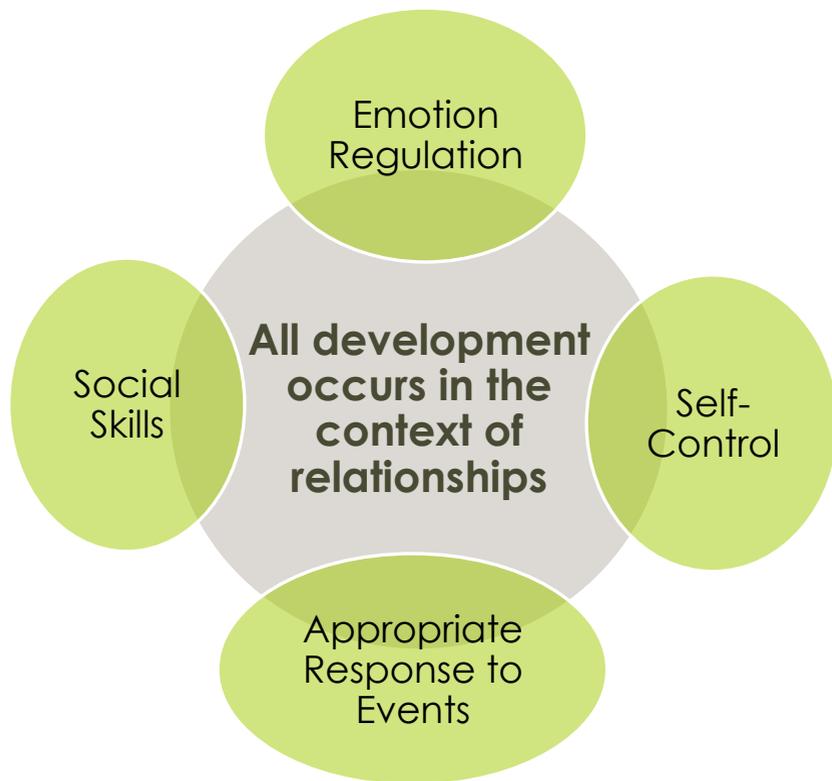
Trauma, the brain and behavior

The emergency response pathways are always “on”

- Constant alert for danger
- Quick to react to perceived threats
- Flooded with stress hormones
- The prefrontal cortex is by-passed

- Easily startled
- Trouble concentrating
- Aggressive outbursts
- Withdrawn/inattentive
- Self-harm
- Sleep problems
- Regressive behaviors
- Risky behaviors

To Know Them – To Love Them – To Reach Them



Brain development is dependent on stimulation and experience

Secure Attachment



Trust the world is safe



Confidence to explore/experience

STRATEGIES to start with..THAT HELP

- Learn the Power of Yes
 - “Yes...
- Use Connecting Strategies
 - “Join me...
- Teach Self Regulation
 - “Can we count together...
- Give the Child Voice
 - “Use your words....
- Match the Child
 - At the child’s level



Understanding The Effects of Trauma on Caregivers/ Parents

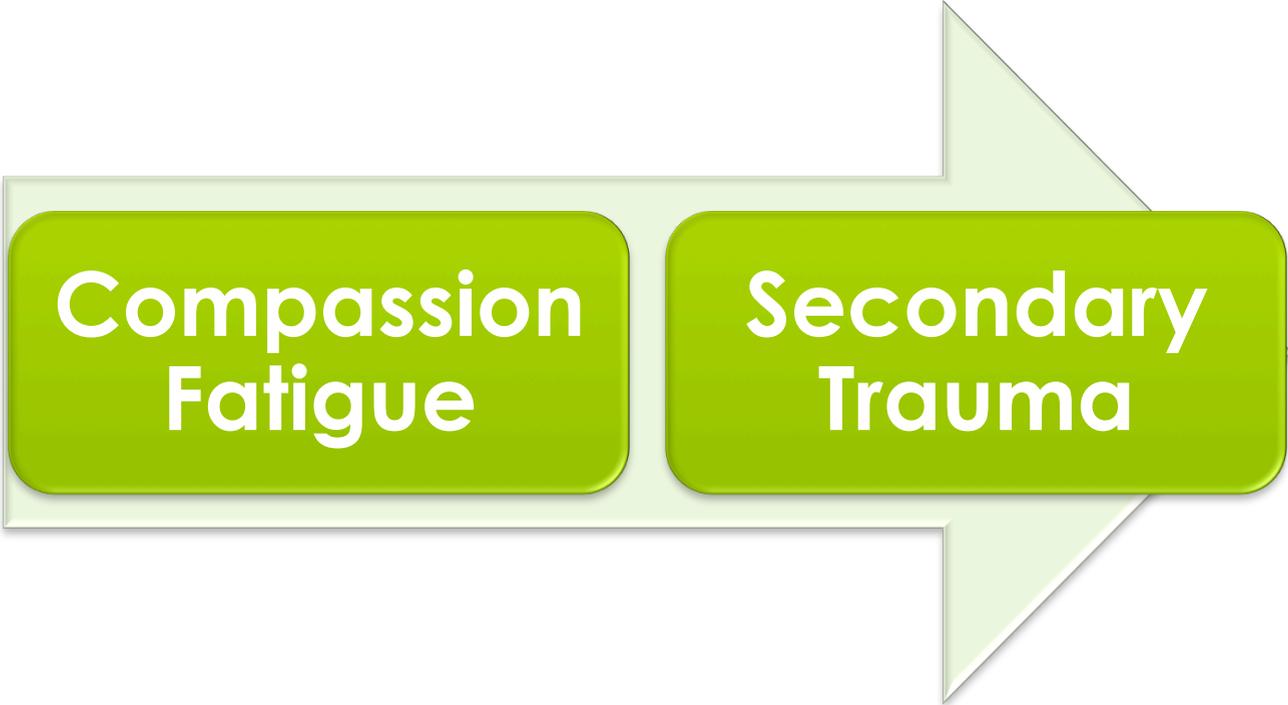
South Africa – 2014
Ruby M. Johnston

Secondary Trauma

This work has an impact on us...



Trauma's potential impact on you....



**Compassion
Fatigue**

**Secondary
Trauma**

Secondary trauma happens because you care about people have been hurt.....

Empathy

Identification with child's experiences and feelings

These feelings are incorporated into your world view

Signs and Symptoms

- **Intrusive: persistent re-experiencing of the traumatic event (images and thoughts, physiological reactions, and dreams)**
- **Avoidant: general numbing in responsiveness and avoidance of trauma-related stimuli**
- **Arousal: hyper vigilance and difficulty concentrating**

Impact

- Unresolved secondary trauma may be one the causes of burnout for those working with traumatized children
- Secondary trauma particularly impacts new ministry workers

Renew your minds daily...

- In Philippians 4:8 the Bible instructs us in proper thinking:
- "And now, my friends, all that is *true*, all that is *noble*, all that is *just and pure*, all that is *lovable and gracious*, whatever is *excellent and admirable*—fill all your thoughts with these things"

Recipe for Trouble

What does this story have to do with adoptive or foster parents and traumatized children? Here's the recipe:



One loving and potentially unprepared adoptive family



One new child with significant trauma and survival strategies



One “cool and pleasant” home



An emotional thermostat to which no one is paying attention

Taking Care of Yourself

It is understanding and examining our own belief system – what we believe drives our emotional response. Our emotional response can dictate our behavior.

Belief	Feelings	Behavior Response
I am losing control	I feel angry and frustrated	I turn up the control knob
I am not competent to parent this child	I feel embarrassed and shameful	I withdraw emotionally from this child/family/friend
This child is doing this to me on purpose (lying, stealing)	I feel “attacked”, angry, betrayed	I discipline this child inappropriately

Taking Care of Yourself

It is identifying areas of vulnerability and change within ourselves and family and being open to doing something about them.

EFFECTS - NEGATIVE

Rating Your Effect

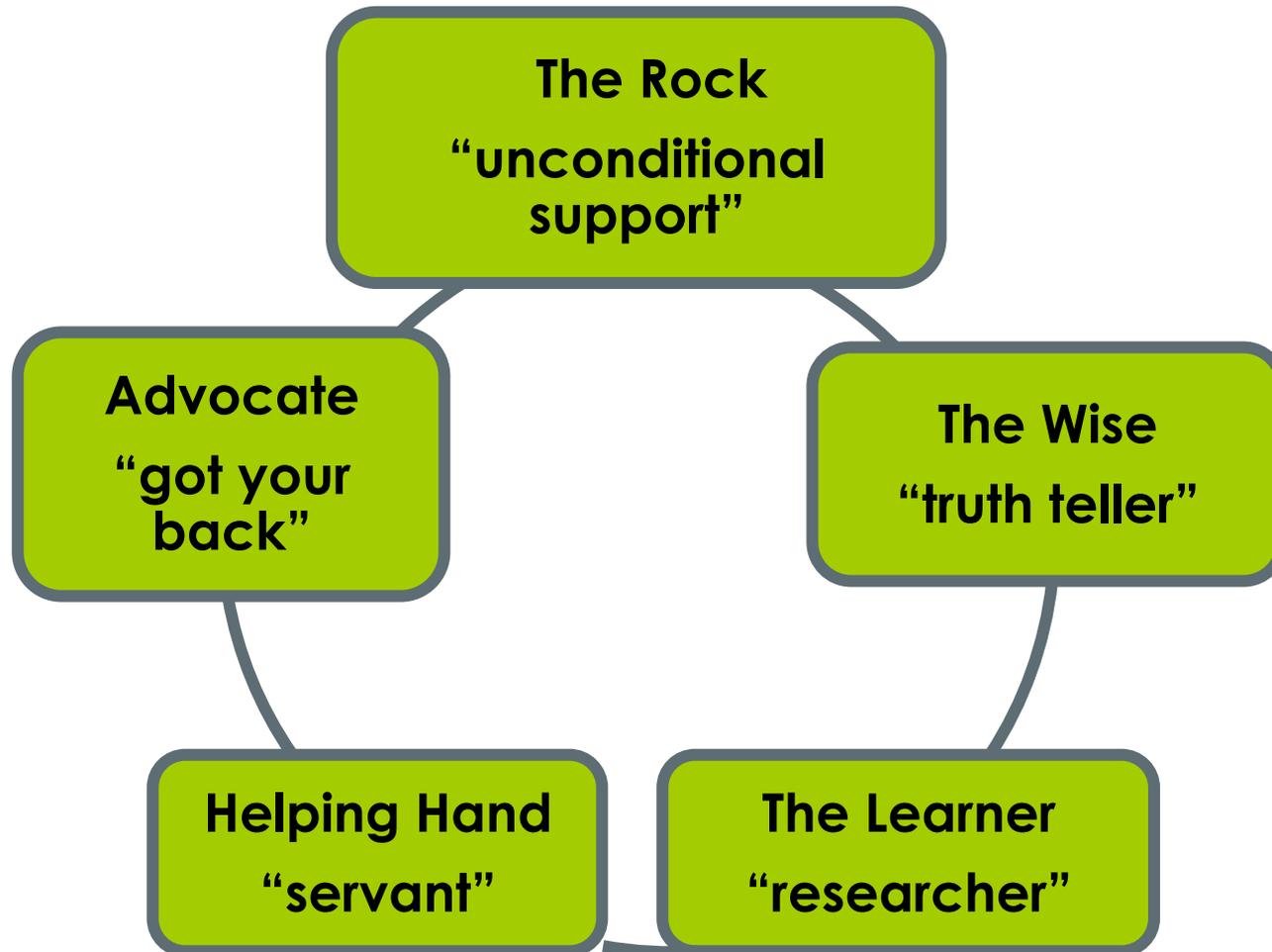
Lack of understanding by family	
Lack of understanding by friends	
Lack of validation as a parent	
Lack of support by family and/or friends	
Lack of support by agency/social workers	
Living with uncertainty every day (child's behavior)	
Feel like living with a time bomb/walking on egg shells	

Need a Support System

Who are they?



CIRCLE OF SUPPORT



Taking It Home Today

- Before we leave, I would like you to identify three key learning points from today. Please share them with the person you came with, or someone sitting beside you.
- We will ask three or four of you to share with the group.

Remember

“To keep the lamp burning we have to keep putting oil in it.”

By Mother Teresa

PREVENTING BURNOUT

